

International Journal of Agriculture Extension and Social Development

Volume 9; Issue 8; August 2026; Page No. 1056-1065

Received: 08-06-2026
Accepted: 12-07-2026

Indexed Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal

Agritourism for gender-inclusive economic development of the farming community: evidences from the Indian Himalayas

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26180723.2026.v9.i8n.4135>

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Abstract

Agriculture is the backbone of Indian rural livelihoods yet it is characterized by a gender paradox. A major proportion of women in agriculture constitute unremunerated hidden workforce. This limits their decision-making authority, economic independence and affects social status. Agritourism is a transformative farm diversification strategy that enables women to monetize their traditional skills, culinary heritage and farm-based skills. This research utilized a qualitative case study approach to document two agritourism enterprises from Uttarakhand, India. The analysis is grounded in three frameworks: Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model, Social Capital Theory (SCT) and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework. Integration of these frameworks are mutually reinforcing, ABCD identifies and mobilizes local resources, SCT enables their coordination and TBL captures the multidimensional outcomes of these processes. Hence, these cases highlight that agritourism can create local employment, generate supplementary income, ensure endogenous development and ecological stewardship. The results of the study provide a policy-relevant roadmap for mainstreaming gender and empowering women economically and technologically through agritourism.

Keywords: Agritourism, gender-inclusive entrepreneurship, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model, social capital theory, Self Help Groups (SHG), sustainable agriculture

Introduction

In India, agriculture is the backbone of rural livelihoods and a substantial proportion of the rural population is engaged in agricultural and allied sector (Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, 2018) [24]. Farming is serving as a critical driver of food security and socio-economic stability yet characterized by gender paradox (Department of Agriculture Uttarakhand, 2020; Mohanty *et al.*, 2024) [9, 26]. In rural areas, a major proportion of women constitute hidden workforce contributing extensively to crop production, livestock management, post-harvest processing, and the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems yet often the role is undervalued, under-recognized and under-paid (Mishra *et al.*, 2024; Vepa, 2005; World Bank, 2020) [25, 39, 42]. While they do the majority of the work, but owns less than 13 per cent of the operational land holdings and earns 20-30 per cent less than their male counterparts. Due to this the farm women have restricted decision-making authority, and persistent gender inequalities in rural economies (Agarwal, 2018; Food and Agriculture Organization, 2011) [2, 13].

In the fragile landscapes of the Indian Himalayas, the disparity and inequality even widen due to male out-migration, leaving women with the dual burden of managing

subsistence farms and household food security (Pattnaik *et al.*, 2018) [28]. The structural invisibility of women's contributions leads to limited access to markets, credit, socio-cultural norms, unequal land ownership, and extension services, which collectively constrain their economic empowerment and social mobility (Doss, 2013; World Bank, 2012) [11, 41]. Hence there arises a dire need for gender-inclusive development strategies in agriculture that not only acknowledge women's roles but also create avenues for their active participation in income-generating activities and local governance systems. In this context, agritourism has emerged as a promising farm diversification strategy that integrates agriculture with tourism to generate supplementary income, highlight and remunerate women's contribution, promote rural development, cope unpredictable losses and empower women socially and economically (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Phillip *et al.*, 2010) [4, 30].

Agritourism is an experience-based enterprise that integrates agriculture with tourism and utilises farm experience and household settings to entertain visitors from urban or non-agriculture dwelling (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009; Phillip *et al.*, 2010) [3, 30]. It provides a unique opportunity to facilitate rural women to secure additional income by commercialising

traditional knowledge, particularly in processing, culinary heritage, handicrafts, and farm-based experiential services (Gil *et al.*, 2019; Halim *et al.*, 2020) ^[14, 17]. Studies have also figured out that agritourism enterprises have generated employment opportunities among rural women and have enhanced their socio-economic status as well as their participation in community decision-making processes (Sulaj & Themelko, 2024; Upadhyay, 2021) ^[36, 38]. Similarly, another study suggested that there is a close linkage between enabling environments and women empowerment outcomes, highlighting that women's engagement in agritourism entrepreneurship is significantly shaped by family dynamics, institutional support, and evolving cultural norms, (Khazami *et al.*, 2024) ^[18]. Moreover, a systematic review indicated that agritourism fosters livelihood diversification, skill enhancement, and increased agency among women, when supported by inclusive governance frameworks and access to markets (Dewi *et al.*, 2025; Phelan & Sharpley, 2011) ^[10, 29]. Further, Baymuradova (2023) ^[5] argues that agritourism facilitates renumeration of women's traditionally unpaid roles by transforming domestic and farm-based activities into income-generating enterprises. This shift not only improves women's financial independence and but also foster self-confidence, leadership capabilities, and social recognition within rural communities (Slater, 2022) ^[35]. Collectively, these insights indicate that agritourism operates as a multidimensional development approach, encompassing economic, social, and cultural dimensions of empowerment. Thus, agritourism enables income generation, skill enhancement, and increased visibility in local economies. Moreover, it aligns with broader sustainable development goals (SDGs) specifically SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), by fostering inclusive growth, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting environmentally sustainable practices (Bhatta *et al.*, 2026; Roman & Kawęcki, 2024) ^[6, 33].

In the state of Uttarakhand, initiatives are taken by tourism department to help farmers and rural dwellers establish certified homestays and start hosting the tourists legally particularly under schemes such as the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Homestay Programme. Under this program, local residents staying in Uttarakhand are required to register their property which is inspected by the authorities from tourism department and upon successful compliance, they are granted certification to host the tourists (Lakhera *et al.*, 2025) ^[20]. These initiatives are helping farmers start integrated farm-tourism models and leverage the unique agro-ecological identity of the Himalayan region to create experiential value for urban tourists (Adhikari, 2023) ^[1]. However, the transition from farm labor to tourism entrepreneurship is fraught with challenges, including infrastructural deficits, water scarcity, and limited digital literacy.

Although, existing studies have extensively examined agritourism as a tool for farm diversification and rural development, there are sporadic attempts on identification and documentation of operational models of agritourism and their role in fostering gender-inclusive entrepreneurship, particularly in the Himalayan context. Existing literature have acknowledged women's participation in various activities of agriculture yet there remains a gap in structured agritourism framework that effectively recognize,

remunerate, and enhance women's contributions to agriculture and rural economies.

The present study is designed against this backdrop that explores the transformative potential of agritourism as a gender-inclusive development pathway in the Indian Himalayan region. A qualitative research design is adopted to investigate two cases from Almora district of Uttarakhand and to contextualise these models. The research objectives are:

1. To assess agritourism as a platform for gender-inclusive empowerment and sustainable livelihood development.
2. To develop a replicable and scalable framework for integrating women's empowerment into agritourism and rural development discourse.

Theoretical frameworks

1. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

Agritourism is most closely associated with Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, which is based on the concept of identifying and mobilizing inherent community assets, indigenous knowledge, skill and practices to drive sustainable development. This framework was pioneered by John L. McKnight and John P. Kretzmann, and highlighted the role of existing assets for economic development of the household and the community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) ^[19]. The framework categorizes assets into three categories which collectively contribute to community resources. These categories are individual (skills, knowledge), associational (community groups, self-help groups), and institutional (local governance bodies, NGOs). ABCD promotes holistic development of community ensuring that marginalized groups, including women, are actively involved in decision-making processes and enterprise creation (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Green & Haines, 2015) ^[21].

2. Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory posits that relation of social networks, trust, norms, and collective action facilitate cooperation and improve socio-economic outcomes within communities. This theoretical framework was developed by Pierre Bourdieu, James S. Coleman, and Robert D. Putnam, and they emphasize different dimensions of social capital and their economic implications ((Bourdieu Pierre, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam Robert D., 1993) ^[7, 8, 32]. Social capital is typically categorized into three forms perform unique functions in the development of agritourism enterprises. These forms are bonding social capital, bridging social capital and linking social capital.

In rural development and agritourism context, social capital acts as a bedrock for facilitating collective entrepreneurship, knowledge sharing, and access to resources. Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs), cooperatives, and community-based organizations demonstrate bonding social capital, enabling trust-based collaboration and mutual support. (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000 (Pretty, 2003)) ^[40].

3. Triple Bottom Line (TBL)

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework was pioneered by John Elkington, it has revolutionized the traditional aspect of economic performance by including social and environmental dimensions along with financial outcomes

(Elkington John, 1997) ^[12]. This framework is frequently summarised as “three Ps” People, Planet, and Profit. TBL asserts that sustainable development can only be achieved by

balanced integration of economic viability, environmental stewardship and social equity (Slaper & Hall Tanya J., 2011; Torres & Momsen, 2004) ^[34, 37].

Table 1: Application of Triple Bottom Line framework to agritourism

Dimension	Focus Area	Agritourism Application
People (Social)	Equity & Culture	Community well-being, indigenous art, culture and heritage preservation, empowering marginalized groups, especially women.
Profit (Economic)	Livelihood & Growth	Farm income diversification, local employment creation, and reduction in rural-to-urban migration.
Planet (Environmental)	Stewardship	Agro-biodiversity conservation, promotion of regenerative farming, and sustainable management of waste and natural resources.

Agritourism inherently aligns with TBL principles and this framework is uniquely critical for policy planning, it enables a holistic assessment of development interventions and ensures that economic gains do not come at the cost of social or environmental degradation (Table 1). In this study, TBL serves as a critical lens to evaluate how agritourism contributes to gender-inclusive growth and sustainable livelihoods in the Indian Himalayan region.

Material and Methods

Socio demography of Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand is a hilly state of India and accounts for 1.62 percent of the total geographical area and 0.83 per cent of the total population of India (Government of India, 2011) ^[15]. The state consists of two divisions The Kumaon division covers an area of 21,035 sq. km. and has a population of 42.28 lakh, whereas the Garhwal division is spread over an area of 32,450 sq.km with a population of 58.56 lakh (Government of Uttarakhand, 2018) ^[16].

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in Uttarakhand and around 58 per cent of work force earns their living from this sector (Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, 2018) ^[24]. The contribution of the primary sector to Uttarakhand's growth has always been low and is showing steady decline (NITI Aayog, 2021) ^[27]. The unemployment

situation is serious in the state. Uttarakhand is ranked below most states of the country in the creation of jobs during the period 2005-2012 (Planning Commission, 2014) ^[31]. The unemployment situation has been severe among the educated (above secondary level) youth with a 17.4 per cent unemployment rate in 2017 (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2018 ; Government of Uttarakhand, 2018) ^[16, 24]

Almora in the Kumaon Division of Uttarakhand has mountainous terrain. It is divided into six sub-divisions viz. Almora, Jainti, Dwarahat, Ranikhet, Bhikyasain and Sult. The district is divided into 12 tehsils, two sub-tehsils, and 11 Development Blocks (Figure 1). Further, there are 95 Nyay Panchayats, 1146 Gram Panchayats, and 2282 villages in the district. Economy of the district mainly depends upon traditional agriculture, horticulture, livestock, forestry, logging, mining, and quarrying. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood in the district. Only 17.11 percent of the total geographical area is cultivable land and major crops grown are *mandua*, paddy, wheat, pulses, oilseeds, etc. Secondary sector has remained constant at around 34 per cent of the state GDP during the period 2011-12 and 2016-17. Tourism contributes maximum to the GDP and can generate substantial employment if right atmosphere and incentives are given (Government of Uttarakhand, 2017).

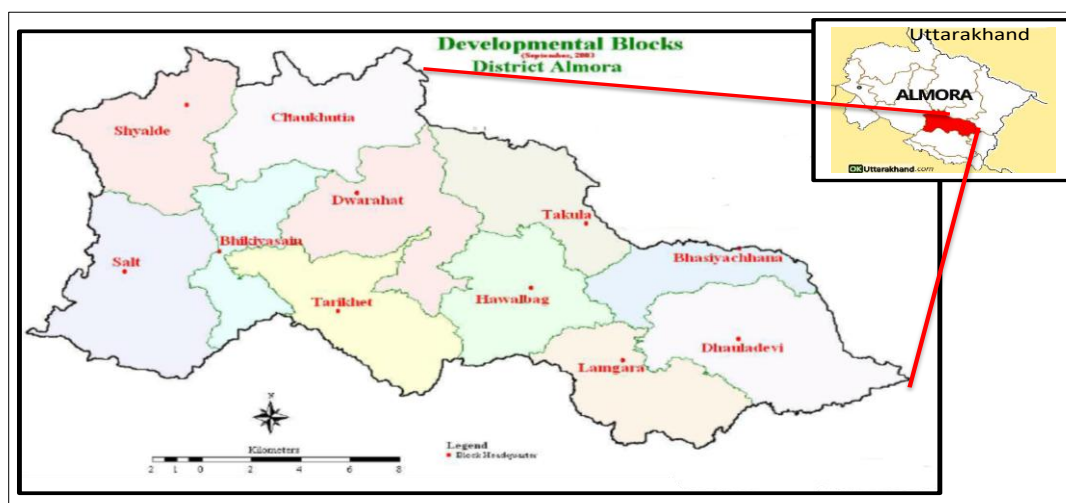


Fig 1: Development blocks of Almora district (source: <http://slusi.dacnet.nic.in/>)

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Home Stay Development Scheme

In Uttarakhand, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Home Stay Development Scheme was started to support rural livelihoods and local economic development. Under this development scheme financial assistance through capital and interest

subsidies are provided for construction and maintenance of accommodation facilities for tourists. The local residents are required to register their house with the tourism department and after verification they are certified and permitted to offer affordable and authentic accommodation for tourists.

Through this the tourists get accommodation facilities along with opportunities to experience Uttarakhand's culture, traditions, and local cuisine. To encourage local resident. In hilly areas, a capital subsidy of 33 percent or up to Rs.10 lakh and an interest subsidy of 50 percent of the interest or up to Rs.1.50 lakh annually for the first five years is provided. While, in plain areas, a capital subsidy of 25 percent or up to Rs.7.50 lakh and an interest subsidy of 50 percent of the interest or up to Rs.1 lakh annually for five years is provided. Through these provisions, the scheme strengthens tourism infrastructure, supports income diversification, and contributes to making Uttarakhand a more attractive and sustainable tourism destination.

Sampling (Selection of the homestay/ agritourism ventures)

A multistage random sampling technique was employed for selecting case study units in Almora district, Uttarakhand. In the first stage, two blocks, namely Tarikhet and Dwarahat, were randomly selected from the district. According to records of the Tourism Department, Almora, at the time of sampling, Tarikhet block had 63 and Dwarahat block had 59 farmers/farm women registered under the Homestay Scheme. In the second stage, one homestay from each selected block was randomly chosen for in-depth case study. Accordingly, Jagriti SHG Agritourism Venture, Majkhali (Tarikhet block) and Mira Abode Homestay, Dwarahat (Dwarahat block) were selected. Thus, a total of two homestays constituted the final sample for the case study investigation.

Results and Discussion

Case1: Jagriti Self Help Group Agritourism Centre (ATC)

Jagriti Self Help Group is functional in Majkhali village located in Tarikhet block of Almora district. The area is famous for its scenic views, natural beauty and adventure activities. Golf course in this area is a famous tourist attraction and one of the best picnic spots in the region is six km away from Majkhali. The SHG comprises of one male and eight female members and all the members of the SHG were fully dependent on farming prior to 2011 and land holding of the SHG members ranges between 1-5 nali. (1 acre=20 nali) Most of the SHG members are educated up to high school. Looking into the tourism potential of the area, the SHG members, in collaboration with Dr. Ajay Rastogi, who was the Co-Founder and Director of *Vrikshalaya* Himalayan Centre started providing immersive experience of resilient mountain village life and mindful meditation. To accomplish these objectives, they designed several programs and one of them is residency program. Under this program the SHGs members provide homestay for tourists from India and abroad.

The SHG members mostly cultivate vegetables (Potato, onion, coriander, garlic, ginger and colocassia), fruits (citrus fruits and pears), cereals (Wheat, rice) and pulses on the farm using traditional methods, mainly for domestic consumption. Most of them possess one to three cows, buffaloes, calf, ox and goats. Milk and value-added milk products are sold for additional income. SHG members earn an average income of around Rs 50,000 to 1.5 Lac per annum from agriculture and dairy farming.

In 2019, all the SHGs members registered their homes under

Deen Dayal Upadhyay Home Stay Scheme of the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, Government of Uttarakhand. Each member of the SHG has earmarked one room of their house to provide accommodation to the tourists. The rooms have basic facilities and the guests are provided home cooked food. The SHG members have participated in training programs on management of homestay and hospitality organized by the Foundation for the Contemplation of Nature Trust which is registered with Government of Uttarakhand.

The Vrikshalaya Himalayan Centre is headquarters of the Foundation for the Contemplation of Nature (FCN), a registered trust that organizes meditation and yoga programs and provides visitors an experience of Himalayan village life. The Centre started its schools and University Program in 2011 and has received students from Universities in USA and other countries. Every year a group of 25 students come to the Centre to complete some credits of their course work related to wildlife, environment, rural and culture studies. They stay at the homestay of the SHG members and actively participate in the host family's day to day activities, which allow them to experience a different culture.

The Centre organizes 2-3 days training programs for SHG members in the village before arrival of each group. Details regarding menu, facilities, guest management, hospitality, activities, schedule, etc. are finalized between the SHG members and the Centre. In addition, travel companies such as National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) and e-Tara also organize customized tours for people to hilly areas. These tours primarily include trekking, hiking, camping and other adventure activities and use the homestays to accommodate their groups.

All the nine homestays are located in village Malli Ryuni in a cluster. The SHG collectively has 12 rooms and can accommodate 20-25 people at a time. Most of the homestays have a large courtyard, which is used for group activities and there is a common parking area at a distance of about 700 meters from the residences. During their stay, the guests not only experience rural life but also get a chance to connect with the host family, prepare and eat home cooked food, walk in fields and pastures, visit local places of worship and or spend time in natural surroundings. They learn life skills and get exposure to a different cultural setting, whilst helping the host family earn additional income.

Although the guests are registered with the foundation (FCN), some additional agritourism activities are organized by the host family under the guidance of Dr. Rastogi. These activities included:

- a) Farming: University students get an opportunity to work on the farm of the host family and carry out various farming practices.
- b) Local celebrations: The guests also participate in local events and celebrations along with the farming community and learn different aspects of the host culture and their traditions.
- c) Day visits: Tourists who do not stay in the village, visit the homestay for lunch or evening tea.
- d) Village Walk/ Hiking: A short trek is organised for visitors to familiarise them with different aspects of the village life.
- e) Bird watching: Visits are organised to the hill top so that visitors can identify different species of birds and for

- photography.
- f) Traditional dance/ village gatherings: Traditional folk dances and music are performed for the guests by the villagers. During these events, the guests from other nations also present their cultural activities.
 - g) Trainings/ demonstration: Workshops on rural crafts like *Alpana* painting, bamboo crafts, food preservation and farming techniques are organized for the students by the SHG members. This helps in promoting and preserving art and culture of the place and generating additional income for the villagers.

According to the SHG's members, after starting agritourism venture, they get an opportunity to interact with people from other places (both India and abroad) and learn new things from them, besides earning additional income. Hosting foreign students during their study abroad is a unique

component of this ATC and it highlights various ways in which agritourism can be promoted and extended.

The SHG members charge Rs. 1000/ day/ person including three meals. In a year they get 5 -10 bookings and the guests stay for 1-4 weeks. On an average, every SHG member reported earnings of around Rs. 70,000/- to 90,000/- per annum from the homestay. Tourist groups staying in Majkhali and Ranikhet *also* visit the village to interact with the villagers and have their lunch and evening tea in the village. The host family earns Rs. 750/ day/group. Home-made local snacks are also sold to tourists from which they earn Rs. 400 to 500 per annum from this activity. Cereals, millets, pulses and spices are also sold to the visitors by some SHG members and fetch around Rs. 1000/- to 5000/- per annum. Some SHG members also sell fruits juices and squash made from rhododendron flowers and each member earns around Rs 4000/- to 5000/- per year from these products.

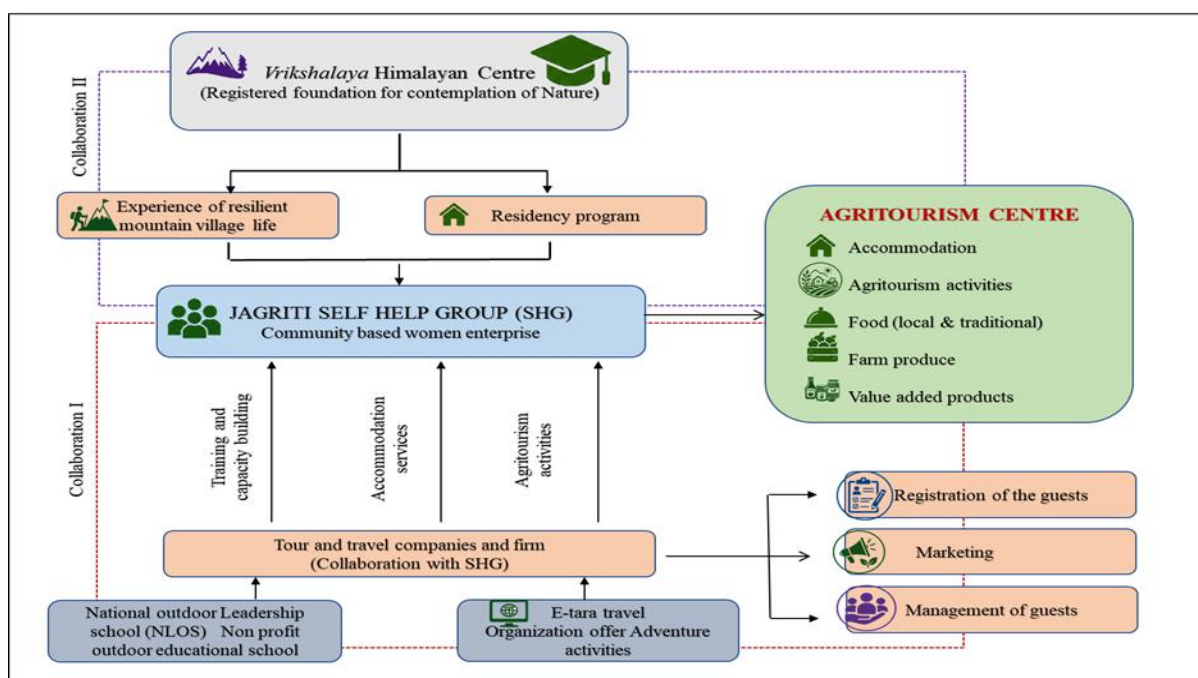


Fig 2: Collaboration model of agritourism centre and nature-based tourism agencies

SHG members reported several constraints faced by them in running the ATC. As women are primarily involved in hosting the visitors from various places and a different culture, safety issues are the most important constraints faced by the group. They have to be cautious and often find it difficult to enforce house rules with male guests. Attack by wild animals is a major concern in the hilly areas and safety of tourists is a constant worry. Infrastructure provided to the guests is basic and many houses are under-maintained due to lack of funds. The women are hesitant to apply for loans due to low literacy, lack of awareness regarding loan, facilities and mistrust in lending institutions. The village is located away from the main road and all the goods are not available at the nearby market. Hence, the SHG members need extra time and efforts to buy goods necessary for running the homestay.

Jagriti Self Help Group received Mountain Prize Award in 2020 for their innovative work towards gender equity and transformational change in the mountains of Uttarakhand. Figure 2 illustrates a collaborative agritourism model linking

women's SHG, nature-based tourism agencies and guest management agencies for training, accommodation and marketing. This model suggests a novel approach for promoting agritourism, which can help farmers in hilly areas supplement their income while empowering women socially and economically.

Case 2: Mirai Abode Homestay

Mirai Abode Homestay is situated in Malli Mirai village, which is four kilometers from Dwarahat and is at an altitude of 1510 m above mean sea level in the Almora district of Uttarakhand. There is a group of ancient temples constructed by Katyuri Kings in this place and is hence also called 'The Temple Town'. The Homestay is owned by Nirmal Rana, who like most of the villagers is dependent on agriculture for livelihood. The Homestay not only provides accommodation, but also provides the visitors an opportunity to experience and participate in local activities. The visitors can pick fruits and vegetables from the farm, cook them in a traditional kitchen, take part in various agriculture activities, go for

walks in the village etc.

Mr. Rana, graduated in English from the Government P G Degree College, Dwarahat. Prior to starting the ATC, he was engaged in mushroom cultivation and used to sell his produce to resorts in Ranikhet, which mainly cater to foreign tourists. At that time, he was influenced by a friend of his, who runs a resort and decided to open his ancestral house in Malli Mirai village to tourists. He turned his ancestral home into a beautiful mud and stone house to accommodate the tourists. He has retained the authenticity of a traditional Kumaoni dwelling to make it attractive to the tourists.

He established Mirai Abode- Dwarahat Village Homestay in 2019, and is managed by him with the help of his wife and his mother. Mr. Rana takes care of management, marketing, hospitality and activities for tourists, while his wife and mother look after the kitchen and housekeeping.

Mr Rana's family was dependent on agriculture and after his father's demise, he decided to carry forward his family's legacy. Besides agriculture, he also rears cattle, and cultivates fruits, vegetables, spices, condiments and pulses on their eight nali (1acer=20 Nali) farm. The Homestay is spread over an area of about one nali and the surrounding 7-8 nali land is utilized for farming. The ATC is housed in a double storied building made of stone, wood and mud which is the characteristic feature of houses in the Kumaon region. The walls are made of stone while the flooring is done with wooden planks and mud to keep them insulated throughout the year. Slate roof and detailed wooden carvings on the doors and windows bring unity in the design of the building. The building opens at the centre, also called "Kholi", which divides the house into two parts on either side of the stairs. The ground floor called "Goth" is used for cattle and storage and people reside on the first floor. The interior space has been organized in a unique manner. It has a drawing area with one bed, television and seating area near the window - also called "Jharokha" in local language and two bed rooms that can accommodate eight people at a time.

The Homestay is registered with the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board. The guests are encouraged to take part in daily chores, especially food preparation. They can also take part in farming, picking vegetables and herbs from the garden and cooking Kumaoni food. They are offered nettle (*Urtica dioica*) tea and Giloy (*Tinospora cordifolia*) drink in the morning that keep the guests energized for the rest of the day. Local dishes like *Gahat ki dal*, *Bhatt ki Chutkani*, *aalu gutke*, *pahadi rayta*, etc. are included in meals along with seasonal vegetables from the farm. The guest can also pick fresh fruits from the orchards (Plate 2).

Visitors staying at the ATC can walk down to nearby places and experience local, culture, traditions and events. They can also explore and enjoy spectacular view of the nearby river and mountains. Bonfires are organized in the courtyard of the homestay and are a big attraction for the tourists. Mr. Rana is a trained musician and enthral the visitors with guitar performance and Kumaoni music at times. Dense forests of Dwarahat are home to a variety of flora and fauna. Mr. Rana often organizes trekking and hiking trips in the nearby forests for the tourists. Bird watching and wildlife photography is another activity open to tourists in the surrounding forests. A local fair 'Syalde Bikhoti Mela' is organized every year on 14th April, and attracts a large number of who are interested

in local traditions and culture.

Mr. Rana is adept at using several strategies to attract visitors. The Homestay has social media presence on Instagram and Facebook. These pages are regularly updated and information about ongoing and upcoming events and activities at the Homestay are posted on these pages. Following the success of the ATC, local newspapers have interviewed Mr. Rana and given publicity that has inspired other farmers in the nearby villages to start similar ventures. Tourists often make short video films of the Homestay and nearby places and post them on their social media pages, thus giving additional publicity. The ATC receives remittances from various activities and products. Most of the revenue comes from accommodation facilities provided to tourists as the Homestay gets about 100 bookings in a year. Food served to the visitors and trips arranged for them also bring in substantial revenue. A small amount is earned from the sale of farm produce to the visitors. The ATC has brought in new employment opportunities for other residents of the village. Taxis are rented by tourists for visiting nearby places and local taxi drivers earn around Rs. 3000 - 7000 per day. Due to poor road connectivity, Mr. Rana also arranges pick up and drop services to and from the nearest airport and railway station. This also generates employment for local car rental agencies and drivers. Tourists often use the services of porter for carrying luggage from the main road to the Homestay and charge Rs 100/- per trip.

Despite the success of the ATC, Mr. Rana reported several constraints. Poor road connectivity is a major problem, which gets compounded during rainy season due to frequent landslides. Visitors are often forced to either cancel their trip or change their travel plans because of blocked roads. Water scarcity is another major problem in the hills due to total dependence on natural water sources and dependence on rain water for agriculture. It is quite difficult to get adequate water for running the homestay and the farm. Attack by wild pigs often destroys the standing crop and little is left for consumption and sale.

Mirai Abode Dwarahat Village Homestay highlights how even small and marginal farmers can enhance their income through agritourism. Mr Rana earns about Rs 30,000/- per month from the Homestay and he is also helping in the conservation of local art, culture and heritage. Figure 3 presents the operational framework of Mirai Adobe Homestay, highlighting resources, operations, outcomes, challenges and partnerships. In spite of several challenges, the Homestay provides memorable experience to the tourists and it provides them an opportunity to forge new relationships by interacting with the local community.

In the present study significant potential of agritourism as a sustainable livelihood diversification strategy was explored in the hill regions of Uttarakhand. In depth investigation of two case studies viz Jagriti SHG Agritourism Venture and Mirai Abode Homestay demonstrated that agritourism can create local employment, strengthen farm resilience, generate supplementary income, and reduce dependence on conventional agriculture, particularly among small and marginal farm households. The study also highlights that agritourism not only promise economic benefits but also promote preservation of traditional knowledge, indigenous architecture, cultural heritage, local cuisine, and ecological stewardship.

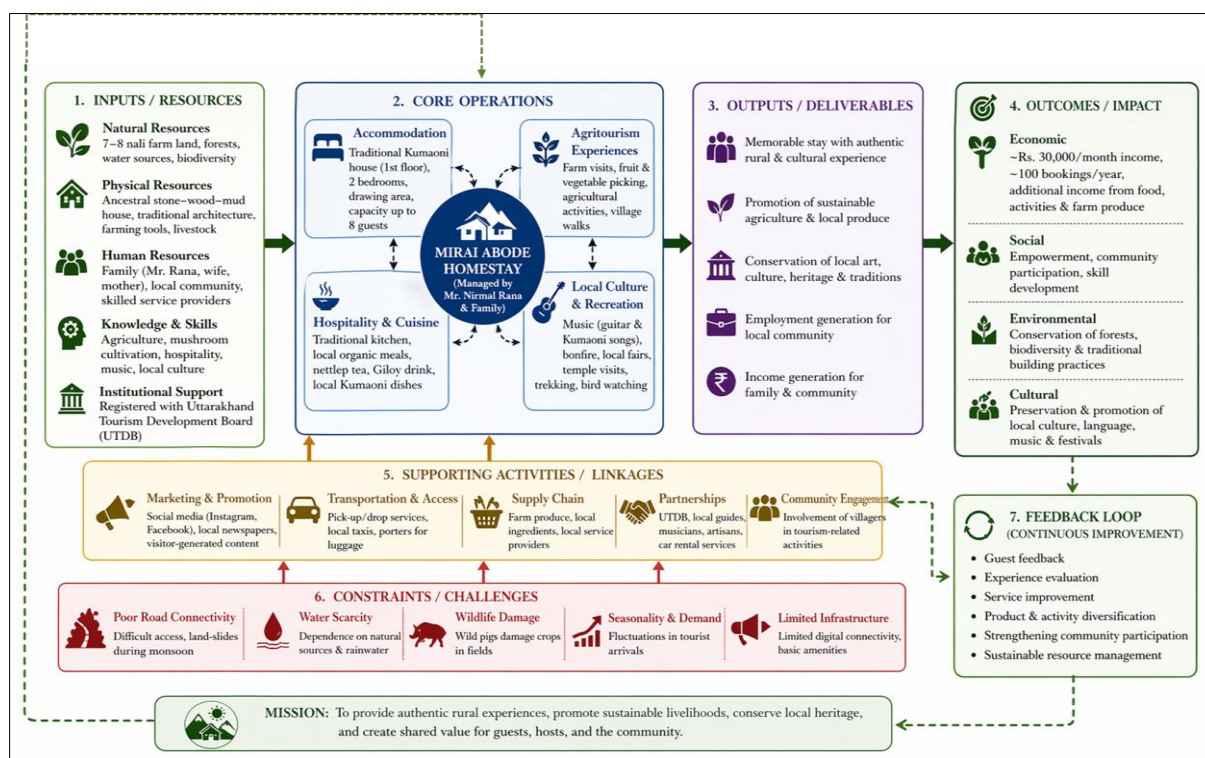


Fig 3: Operational Framework of Mirai Adobe Home stay/agritourism venture

The findings suggest that both collective and individual agritourism models can serve as effective pathways for rural entrepreneurship, although their operational mechanisms differ. The SHG-led model illustrates the importance of collective action, institutional linkages, and social capital in fostering inclusive development, while the individual family-managed model demonstrates how farm-based hospitality and experiential tourism can create viable entrepreneurial opportunities at the household level. Together, these cases underscore that agritourism can function as a multidimensional rural development strategy addressing unemployment, out-migration, and livelihood vulnerability in mountain regions.

However, the study also reveals structural challenges including inadequate infrastructure, water scarcity, wildlife threats, safety concerns, and limited policy support, which constrain the growth and sustainability of such ventures. Addressing these systemic constraints is essential for realizing the full developmental potential of agritourism. Overall, the study positions agritourism as a promising instrument for fostering sustainable rural transformation and inclusive socio-economic development in fragile Himalayan ecosystems.

The study is subjected to several limitations. First, the outcomes have limited generalizability as the study is based on two cases from a single district, which may affect the extrapolation of outcomes to other geographies and socio-economic conditions. Secondly, the study was analytical rather than broad statistical representation and this may constraint large-scale applicability. Thirdly, the study adopts a predominantly qualitative case study approach and relies considerably on respondent narratives and self-reported information regarding income, impacts, and constraints, which may involve subjectivity. Fourth, the analysis is cross-sectional in nature and does not capture long-term changes in

enterprise sustainability, livelihood outcomes, or social transformation. Finally, while the study focuses primarily on host perspectives, visitor perceptions and demand-side dynamics were not examined in detail, representing an important area for further inquiry.

Theoretical Implication

Jagriti Self-Help Group (SHG) operated agritourism venture and Mirai Abode Homestay in Dwarahat collectively illustrate the potential of agritourism as a community-driven and entrepreneur-led rural development strategy in hilly regions of India. Assessing these cases through the lenses of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), Social Capital Theory, and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework these cases reveal complementary pathways for sustainable livelihood diversification.

From the perspective of ABCD framework both cases demonstrate the mobilization of locally embedded assets rather than reliance on external inputs. In the Jagriti SHG model, collective assets such as traditional farming knowledge, cultural practices, and community organization are transformed into a cluster-based agritourism enterprise. In contrast, Mirai Abode reflects an individual entrepreneurial approach, where the owner leverages ancestral property, architectural heritage, and agro-ecological resources to create an authentic homestay experience. In both cases, local food systems, traditional knowledge, and cultural identity serve as foundational capital, reinforcing the principle of endogenous development. Notably, the SHG model highlights the central role of women in activating and managing these assets, while the Mirai Abode case illustrates utilisation of family labour across diverse activities thereby recognising and remunerating the contribution of female member of the family and complement community-level development Social Capital Theory further explains the

mechanisms through which these assets are operationalized. The Jagriti SHG case reflects the blend of social capital, trust-based collaboration, shared responsibilities, and collective decision-making. This blend is evident through partnerships with external organizations, educational institutions, and tourism networks. Similarly, the Mirai Abode Homestay demonstrates the role of bridging and linking social capital through connections with tourists, social media platforms,

and local service providers (e.g., taxi operators, porters), which expand market access and visibility. While the SHG model is rooted in collective social capital, the Mirai case highlights how individual entrepreneurs can build and leverage networks to create economic opportunities. In both contexts, social capital reduces transaction costs, enhances coordination, and strengthens resilience against external shocks.

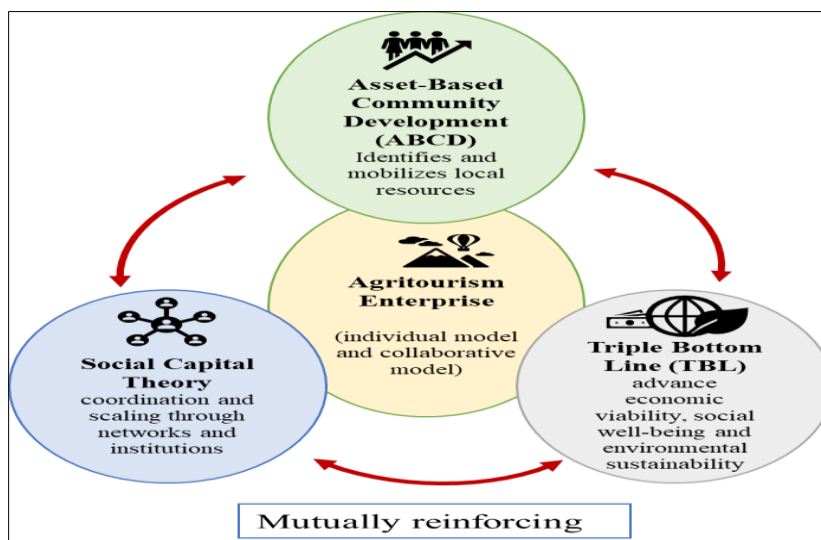


Fig 4: Mutually reinforcing theoretical frameworks supporting agritourism enterprise

From a sustainability perspective, both cases align with the Triple Bottom Line framework proposed by John Elkington. Economically, agritourism provides diversified income streams through accommodation, food services, guided activities, and sale of farm produce. The SHG model generates distributed benefits across multiple households, whereas the Mirai Abode Homestay demonstrates the viability of single-enterprise income generation. Socially, both cases contribute to cultural preservation, community engagement, and experiential learning for visitors. The SHG model particularly advances women's empowerment and collective agency, while the Mirai case fosters cultural exchange through personalized interactions and local storytelling. Environmentally, both initiatives rely on low-input traditional agriculture and nature-based tourism activities, promoting ecological sustainability and environmental awareness among visitors. Importantly, the integration of these frameworks reveals that ABCD, social capital, and TBL are mutually reinforcing (Figure 4). Hence these cases demonstrate the diversity of agritourism models within rural economies.

Practical Implication

The findings generate important implications for context-specific policy interventions. From a policy perspective, the study suggests that agritourism should be recognized as a strategic component of rural development and mountain livelihood policy. Policies should recognize and support both collective (SHG-based) and individual entrepreneurial models by facilitating access to credit, capacity-building programs, and market linkages. It is essential to strengthen institutional support through collaboration with tourism departments, training agencies, and local governance bodies

for improving service quality and ensuring standardization. Infrastructure development, particularly in terms of road connectivity, water supply, and maintenance of rural housing, remains critical for enhancing tourist accessibility and experience. Additionally, policies must incorporate gender-sensitive measures to ensure safety, equitable participation, and leadership opportunities for women, especially in SHG-led initiatives. The integration of digital tools and social media marketing should be encouraged to expand outreach and visibility of rural tourism enterprises. Finally, environmental sustainability must be embedded within policy frameworks by incentivizing eco-friendly practices, conservation of traditional architecture, and sustainable agricultural methods. Collectively, such measures can enable agritourism to function as a resilient pathway for livelihood diversification, cultural preservation, and inclusive rural transformation.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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